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Sandinista Now Spells Corruption

Are the revolutionary rulers of Nicaragua trying to surpass the late, corrupt Anastasio Somoza's record as the hemisphere's greediest dictatorship? The word we get from Managua is that the Marxist Sandinistas are making a good run for Somoza's title.

In fact, the Sandinista leaders and their cronies are so blatant about their pursuit of luxury and wealth that the long-suffering Nicaraguan people know all about it, and some of them cynically refer to the revolution as *el engano*, meaning the trick or hoax.

From U.S. intelligence and other sources, we've pieced together this story of a people's revolution betrayed by the Marxist millionaires who stole control:

The three *commandantes* who dominate the Sandinista junta, Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega and Tomas Borge, have divvied up the country's import market through two monopoly companies. What the Ortega brothers don't control, Borge does.

Daniel Ortega is the president of Nicaragua; Humberto is minister of defense and head of the army. Their key company is Alfa Comercial, which handles goods imported for the government. It is like the U.S. General Services Administration, except that the Ortegas are allowed to skim a percentage off the top of each transaction.

Rivaling their official pillage is the empire being built by Borge, the only surviving founder of the Sandinista movement. He is in charge of the police and internal security.

Borge walks with a pronounced limp, a souvenir of torture in the same Somoza prisons where his enemies are now mistreated. Borge was liberated in 1978 during the dramatic takeover of government buildings in Managua by Eden Pastora, now an embittered foe of his old Sandinista comrades.

Borge's import company, H M Corp., imports whatever goods the Ortegas don't.

Like the Ortegas, Borge has his own elegant private restaurants, off-limits to everyone but the Sandinista leaders and their guests. The government pays the tab. Borge also owns the Mau Mau, a discotheque in Managua that is the favorite of U.S. Embassy Marine guards.

Borge and the Ortegas flaunt their *nouveau riches*. Each owns more than half a dozen houses in the capital, according to competent sources. The Ortega family has nine beach houses in the San Juan del Sur resort.

Mansions that once were Somoza's also are available for the Sandinista leaders' use. They are known as "protocol houses" in a transparent attempt to make them look official.

This is the tragedy of the Nicaraguan revolution. A popular uprising after years of repression and exploitation has been totally corrupted. The people still live in poverty.

Footnote: A spokeswoman for the Nicaraguan Embassy denied "absolutely" that Borge and the Ortega brothers owned any houses other than the ones they live in. She also maintained that only one company imports goods used by the government and it is state-owned. All of the restaurants in question, she added, are owned by the state.

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